

IN THE CLAIMS:

Entry of the following amendments to the claims is respectfully requested:

1. (currently amended) A process for sterilizing objects on their surfaces, comprising the steps of:

dampening the object surfaces by condensing a steam compound of water and hydrogen peroxide, and

removing the condensed fluid from the surfaces by drying,

wherein the dampening step includes abruptly releasing of the steam compound into a sterilizing chamber without additional transport gas flow, so that the steam compound becomes over-saturated and condenses ~~in the shortest possible time~~ on the surfaces within three seconds, and

wherein the drying is carried out by evacuation at a pressure below boiling points of water and hydrogen peroxide.

2. (cancelled)

3. (previously presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein the steam compound is generated in an evaporator and subsequently fed into a separate sterilization chamber to dampen the objects, the pressure of the sterilization chamber being lower than the steam pressure of the steam compound.

4. (previously presented) A process according to claim 3, wherein the steam compound flows from the evaporator into the sterilization chamber

essentially by means of adiabatic expansion.

5-15. (cancelled)

16. (currently amended) Apparatus for sterilizing surfaces of objects comprising:

means for generating a steam compound of water and hydrogen peroxide,
a sterilization chamber accommodating objects to be sterilized,

means for dampening surfaces of the objects in the sterilization chamber by abruptly releasing the steam compound into the sterilizing chamber without additional transport gas flow being applied to the steam compound, so that the steam compound becomes over-saturated and condenses ~~in the shortest possible time~~ on the surfaces within three seconds, and

means for subsequently removing condensation fluid from the surfaces of the objects by drying carried out by evacuation of the sterilization chamber at a pressure below boiling points of water and hydrogen peroxide.

17. (cancelled)

18. (previously presented) Apparatus according to claim 16, wherein the means for generating a steam compound includes an evaporator chamber separate from the sterilization chamber, and

wherein means are provided for maintaining the pressure of the sterilization chamber lower than the pressure in the sterilization chamber.

19. (previously presented) Apparatus according to claim 18, wherein the means for dampening the surfaces include means for inducing flow of the steam compound from the evaporator chamber to the sterilization chamber by adiabatic expansion.

20. (cancelled)